

COMMENTARY

POUJADE: HITLER OR PIERROT?

First Postwar Mass Movement on the Right

HERBERT LUETHY

"**P**OUJADOLF" was invented by a British cartoonist, Vicky. It will probably dog Pierre Poujade to the end of his days. The whole French left has clasped the expression to its bosom. The extreme right, which tends to sympathize with Poujade, retorted with rather strained plays on the name of Mendès-France, none of which was funny. All they did was provide more evidence of the anti-Semitic inclinations of the far right. Poujade himself only made things worse by declaring that he was neither an anti-Semite nor a xenophobe, but merely against "government by vagabonds," and that anyone with a voice in France's public affairs ought to be at least a third-generation French citizen.

PIERRE POUJADE's movement, swollen by its astonishing successes in the recent elections for France's National Assembly, has created alarm by its fascist overtones. HERBERT LUETHY, having kept an eye on the movement since its first emergence, tries to determine to what extent apprehension is justified. Mr. Luethy, who regularly reports on Continental affairs for COMMENTARY, is the author of *France Against Herself*, which was acclaimed by the critics on its publication over here last year. A native of Switzerland and a resident of Paris, he writes on literature, economic history, and a whole variety of subjects as well as on current politics. This article was translated from the German by Maurice J. Goldbloom.

I remember Jean-Paul Sartre, eight years ago over the radio, finding almost every feature of Hitler's face in General de Gaulle's—"except the forelock." Well, there were a few more differences than that, but "fascism" and "fascist" have become terms of everyday abuse in France which people instantly hurl at the first opponent in sight. (I believe the Communists started the fashion.) Certainly Poujade is guiltless of *looking* like Hitler. He has an essentially healthy, somewhat chubby, open face bespeaking average intelligence and belonging to a lively *homo aurignacensis*, a real southern Frenchman: "one of the boys" from head to foot. His appearance is not too unlike that of the young Maurice Thorez of pre-war days, who also looked like "one of the boys." How appearances can deceive!

IN FRANCE the most casual sort of criteria serve to identify individuals and groups as anti-republican, "hence" fascist. Of course, they have to belong to the right; for the purposes of current polemic, this is already enough to make a man a "fascist." But people with some intellectual scruples wait until a politician calls for "authority and order," and criticizes the parliamentary system, before they pin the label on him. "Leader worship" and "anti-parliamentarism" are indeed declarations of war against a republic solidly

based on the principles of absolute parliamentarism and leaderlessness.

In the egalitarian Republic of France, parliament—ruling through changing committees called “ministries” or “executives” in which every politician is entitled to “have his turn”—is supreme. The chief concern of politics is to make sure that nobody stays on top too long. This accords with a way of thinking that sees freedom assured only by keeping a balance between contending factions. This almost feudal notion is echoed consciously in parliamentary jargon. The district from which a man hails is called his “fief,” his constituents are his “clientele,” and the local powers who “make” the election are called “electors.” And there is the ritual formula by which any politician who agrees to form a government or take over a ministry must first “consult his friends.” Only an occasional scandal disturbs this routine.

Of course, this way of running a country's affairs has never been altogether satisfactory. A more or less considerable body of France's citizenry, camped on the margins of her republican party system, has always refused to go along with it and clamored for “authority,” “leadership,” and “order.” There have been the Royalists, the Bonapartists, the Boulangists, the anti-parliamentary leagues and the veterans' associations of the years between the wars, then after the war the Gaullists. Today, not quite hatched out yet, there are the Poujadists.

Paradoxically, the Republic *needs* its anti-democratic enemies, for it makes up for the fewness of its positive supporters by those many negative ones who are always ready to defend it against any and every “enemy on the right.” The Republic never feels stronger, never is its conscience better, than when it can proclaim itself in danger: then the heroic hour of the Tennis Court Oath and of the republican *levée en masse* sounds again. In its normal functioning, however, the Republic enjoys scarcely any popular affection. Reading the French press, of whatever complexion, or listening to conversations in bistros, one is dismayed at the mixture of indifference and abysmal contempt with

which parliament, government, and political parties are spoken of.

THERE is nothing new about this. In popular legend, the history of the Third Republic, and now of the Fourth, is one long tale of scandals never aired in court because of the secret solidarity of the politicians' guild and the subservience of police and judiciary. (Today, for instance, the ten years' war in Indo-China is rumored to have been nothing but a big currency swindle.)

It is strange how little French politicians themselves seem to be troubled by the popular feeling that “everything stinks”—a feeling only confirmed by the fact that not a beginning has been made at getting to the bottom of a single one of all the public scandals of the postwar period. No wonder the ordinary citizen seems equally ready to vote “left” for the Communists, “right” for the Poujadists, or not at all. And if he does end up by voting for one of the conventional parties, it doesn't necessarily signify approval; his vote may be based on some practical consideration, or simply on the resigned feeling that “even *that* is better than a dictatorship.” To be sure, the left has traditionally claimed a monopoly on republican sentiment. Yet for the 5,400,000 French Communist voters, as for others, voting “left” has little to do with any concern for freedom and democracy. It does not mean voting for, but voting against—against the rich, against the priests, against the generals, against the Americans, against anyone and everyone. It means discontent and resentment.

Half a century ago Anatole France said: “The Republic governs badly, but defends itself well.” When a dictatorship threatens, the French parliament suddenly loses its character as a mere “talk shop” and stands forth as the sole defender and guarantor of liberty. And it is able—and forced—to do so because it is in truth the only democratic institution possessing real powers in a country utterly devoid of regional freedoms or communal autonomy. Parliament, as the single and exclusive expression of the sovereign people's will, perches like an artificial head

on top of a centralized administrative apparatus that has been inherited from the absolute monarchy, and a system of prefects responsible solely to Paris that has been inherited from Napoleon. All other French liberties exist on sufferance, their only guarantee the fact that the state machinery can be expected to be kept passive and impotent by parliamentary dissension. Were a cabinet to make uninhibited use of all the legal powers possessed by the national administration, liberty would vanish from every corner of France. Thus the Republic is, in effect, simply a negation—the absence of all effective government being the negation, in French eyes, of dictatorship. Drift and indecision on the one hand, authoritarian rule on the other—the French idea of the state seems to offer no third possibility.

BETWEEN parliamentary elections the French citizen has every opportunity to express his opinion, but none at all to make it effective. By the single act of casting his vote, he abdicates his sovereignty for a period of five years to the National Assembly. This is true in all matters from the most local and immediate to national, colonial, and international questions. It is obvious that this leaves his representatives the widest possible freedom of interpretation. Let him plump ever so emphatically for the extreme right or the extreme left, the parliament chosen by his vote has its own standards for deciding what he meant. Between elections, one and the same National Assembly will bring forth at least a dozen different governments, now left, now right, now piebald, and the "sovereign people" will have nothing whatever to say in the matter. Parliament has confiscated democracy for its own use.

Policy is made in the Palais Bourbon, and nowhere else. People outside this magic circle gabble about politics as freely as about the weather, and with just about as much effect. Of course, in the new elections at the end of the legislative term, the voter should be able to call his deputy to account. But even this isn't so easy. In the first place, the people are convinced that the deputies are

all really "under one umbrella." And in fact the merry-go-round of new governments during the life of one legislature usually brings everybody into office at one time or another. The only deputies who can convince one that they are not under the "same umbrella" are those who, if they came to power, would do away with the Republic altogether.

Rhetorically, at least, the Republic is always in danger. Yet the capacity of France's parliamentary regime for surviving every threat to itself from inside the country is fantastic. The Gaullist episode gave new proof of this. In 1947 de Gaulle still wore the halo of liberator and restorer of the Republic. His prestige was so great that he wasn't the only one to think that all he had to do was give the signal and all France would rally round him. Using the old Boulangist slogans of "constitutional reform" and "dissolution of parliament," he campaigned against the "regime of impotence and decadence" and for a "strong state," a stable government, and an authority standing above the parties. At his first venture—in the politically insignificant general elections for the communal councils—he did in fact win almost 40 per cent of the vote. This, together with the 30 per cent won by the Communists, put all the parties loyal to the republican regime in a minority, but at the same time brought them together in a rather cozy "equality of danger." Then nothing more happened. The old parliament, chosen before the founding of the Gaullist Rally, sat on for another four years. When new elections finally came round in 1951, de Gaulle's "renovation movement" had been worn down to half its initial strength. (This decline was helped along by the adoption of new election rules favoring the center parties.)

It took another two years for what was left of the Gaullist parliamentary delegation to be completely absorbed and corrupted by what de Gaulle called "the games, the joys, and the poisons of the system." No other parliamentary group scrambled so eagerly for ministerial posts and portfolios. No one brought as much confusion, mendacity, and

lack of dignity into parliament as did these Gaullist deputies in their feverish haste to make use of the period of grace left before the example of their "leader," who had long since taken leave of "his" deputies, would be followed by the voters. Thus for four years, a hundred deputies representing no party and no constituents at all played a decisive role in French politics.

In the 1956 elections General de Gaulle himself, having retired into his melancholy meditations on France's mission and fate, demonstratively stayed away from the polls. The voters who had once rallied from all quarters of the political compass to support him again scattered to the four winds—the Gaullist vote dropping to 4 per cent. Some shifted their allegiance to Pinay's conservative Independents. Some in the Paris area and in individual constituencies with a left-radical tradition supported Mendès-France and the Republican Front. Most of them, however, voted for a new standard bearer of anti-parliamentarism, Pierre Poujade. The 2,600,000 votes his movement got in the elections came from all sectors of that disoriented mass of floating voters whose convulsive changes of mind are one sure symptom of the French political malaise.

The starting point and stronghold of Poujadism is in "underdeveloped" southeast France, where, as it happens, de Gaulle was never strong. Here the discontented of all parties, including a considerable number of Communists (whose recent big gain of seats was due to the division of the center between "Mendèsists" and "Faurists," rather than to any actual increase in Communist votes), went over to Poujade as the loudest and most active malcontent. There would have been an even bigger Poujadist vote if all the pollsters and experts had not united, rather too eagerly, to deny that this movement of small tradesmen, loud-mouths, and illiterates, this "uprising of the unpolitical," had a real chance. This error was the symptom of a state of mind blind to everything taking place outside official politics, and especially to what goes on among the little people in their market places and workshops.

Only Pinay's Independents, who appealed to the same voters as Poujade, smelled what was in the wind. The Independents' pressure for early elections was as much motivated by their concern over Poujade's rise and by a desire to steal his thunder, as by the domestic and international political situation; they were certainly much less afraid of Mendès-France. Only a month before the "precipitate" dissolution of parliament, the Poujadists had won an unexpected and complete victory in the voting for the chambers of commerce (not to be confused with the similarly named unofficial American organizations) of half of France, whose office-holders were accustomed to regard their posts as lifelong benefices. People who otherwise never voted did so this time, and it was enough to turn the chambers of commerce upside down.

POUJADISM is Gaullism's most important heir, and is nourished by the same instinctive popular reaction against the customs and usages of French parliamentarism which gave de Gaulle his following. But it would be difficult to find even the slightest similarity of style, origin, or mentality between the two "Fuehrers." Poujadism is not just the turbulent southern French variant of Gaullism; in many respects it is its sharpest antithesis. The belligerent stationery dealer of Saint-Céré has seldom troubled his head about those notions of French power, greatness, and glory around which de Gaulle's thinking revolves. Having become a prominent politician overnight, Poujade has had to formulate or borrow halfway consistent attitudes on national and international affairs in all haste. The "strong state" was the alpha and omega of de Gaulle's program. Poujade won his prestige as a rebel and enemy of the state, as a man who threw tax-collectors into the street, twisted the noses of prefects, and insulted government ministers.

The difference in their regional origins signifies more than a difference in personal temperament: the two men are rooted in entirely different traditions. De Gaulle, the descendant of an old northern French family

of officials and officers, was brought up in the traditions of absolute monarchy. Pierre Poujade is a half-declassed petty bourgeois from the Massif Central, the desolate "slum of France," an area always handled in step-motherly fashion by the centralized state. The tradition he embodies is an entirely different one, but it has existed for centuries all over France, and especially in the mountains: the tradition of the *Jacquerie*—the revolt against taxation of the "little people" to whom the state has always looked like a robber baron.

In 1860, the Department of Lot, which is where Poujade comes from, had 300,000 inhabitants. In 1900, it had 240,000; in 1936, 162,000, and according to the last census, in 1954, 147,000. The eight departments of the Massif Central, to which the Poujade movement was confined until the fall of 1954, have lost approximately half their population in the past century. In two of them, Lozère and Creuse, the loss from 1936 to 1954 came to 17 and 14 per cent, respectively. Only in one, Puy-de-Dôme, does depopulation appear to have come to a halt.

Today, when the population of France as a whole is again starting to rise, the division of the country into two areas of entirely different development makes itself felt twice as strongly. On the one side, there is the industrial, prosperous, modern France of north of the Loire, which includes the Paris basin (whose population has over the last seventy years more than doubled, absorbing in each of the last two decades more than the total increase in the national population). Not only has there now been a sharp new rise in population in the heavy-industry areas of northern and northeastern France, but in recent years it has begun to rise in scattered departments of the Rhone, Alpine, and Pyrenees regions, where previous trends towards depopulation have been reversed by the effects of great electric power projects and a tendency, observable in all modern states, towards decentralization.

The "other France" remains excluded from modernization, from the transportation and market network centering on Paris, and from

the new prosperity, and its decline continues unabated. This "other France" includes Brittany and its immediate borders—likewise a home of chronic *Jacquerie*—a chain of departments in the Alps, the Jura, and the Vosges, and above all the compact mass of the Massif Central and almost all of southwestern France south of the line of the Loire. There are thirty-eight departments in these regions where the loss of population continues unchecked. There, regional crafts have entirely died out or at best vegetate. There, cities are sleepy market towns, or at best small tourist centers. Agriculture, which employs 70 per cent of the working population, still proceeds under that wretched and archaic system (so prized by the romanticizers of "eternal France") which includes wooden plows, share-cropping, and a pastoral or two-field economy. In 1951 average per capita income of peasants in the Massif Central and southwestern France was estimated at \$442, as against an average of \$1510 for the Paris basin and the North. And the rapid mechanization of agriculture in northern France has probably increased this discrepancy since then.

THE population decline in "backward" France is not accompanied by a commensurate drop in the number of economic units, whether businesses or farms. This, however, happens to be a normal phenomenon in declining areas. In places not entirely abandoned (there are more than a few in France) somebody always stays behind to carry on the inherited store, the paternal workshop, or the ancestral farm. Where a single enterprise no longer provides enough for a living, additional sources of income are sought. The shoemaker's wife runs a vegetable store, the innkeeper sells newspapers, the butcher runs a little hotel. And everybody tries to make a little during the tourist season by renting out a room or even his house. (The poor but lovely Massif Central has many health and vacation resorts; only they are not patronized by foreign tourists with money, but by thrifty vacationists from Paris and northern France.)

For the most part, "trade and industry" in the Massif Central form a crazy-quilt. When the tax office asks proprietors for exact information about their incomes, it is often asking for more than they themselves know. The old joke about the tradesman who kept no books because if he did he would have had to declare himself bankrupt is an everyday reality here. No distinction is made by storekeepers between business and household funds, between their meager stocks in trade and what's in their kitchens and cellars. When business is bad they eat up their stock; when it turns better, they re-stock. Under war and inflation, this sort of existence was comparatively easy, and *pâté de fois gras* with truffles, the principal export product of the Lot department, was worth its weight in gold on the black market. By an unfortunate coincidence inflation came to an end just when more rigid tax audits were put into effect. In 1953, in accordance with his instructions, the tax collector in Cahors sent auditing squads out into the small towns of Quercy (the traditional name of the region of which the department of Lot forms part), and a revolt broke out. It was directed just as much against modern accountancy as against tax collectors.

The falsified tax return is an ancient and unchallenged right of the French petty bourgeoisie, and tax evasion is one of the conditions of their existence in the backward provinces. To threaten them with inventory checks, audits, and writs of execution is like threatening to put them out of business. Poujadism was born as an act of primitive self-defense.

Of course, a tax revolt is never a "solution." If the inhabitants of the Massif Central and the southwest were declared free from all taxes, it would not remedy their situation much. The French peasant lives practically tax-free anyhow; though he makes up close to 40 per cent of the population, he contributes less than 2 per cent of the national taxes. Turnover taxes from a department of northern France amount to over a hundred billion francs; in a department of the Massif Central they come to three billion. As long

as the tax revolt and tax strike remained confined to this "slum of France," neither the government nor public opinion got very excited, the material loss being insignificant.

Of course, the Poujadists oversimplify when they say that "the state of the trusts and technocrats" has sworn the ruin of the small businessman. But the claim is not made out of thin air. All experts now agree that small business in France is overstaffed, and that the competitive capacity of French industry is diminished by the artificial preservation of obsolete small enterprises.

The entire French economy is burdened in any case by artificial preservation. Efforts are being made to eliminate it, but what is healthy for one France can be devastating for the other. Middlemen flourished parasitically in the years of war and inflation, and now their number must again be reduced to tolerable dimensions. But in southwestern France, the "overstaffing of trade and small industries" is the result, not of the inflation boom, but of the wasting away of the economy. And the alternative to the present way of life there is not change of occupation or modernization, but emigration to the industrial cities of northern France. Here in the heart of France, just as in North Africa, a great need for productive investments does not suffice to check—much less reverse—the accelerated flight of property and capital.

In its new state of relative stability and prosperity, the French economy shows a disquieting tendency to contract still further with each goal it achieves. Contraction and expansion go hand in hand. In the fashion not of the 20th but of the 19th century, the activity of the country concentrates itself in ever smaller areas while the provinces empty and the empire crumbles away.

POUJADE'S "movement of Saint-Céré" has converted the legendary act of "popular solidarity over and above all parties" by which it was founded into a stirring symbol. One Frégeac, a carpenter and also a Communist town councillor of Saint-Céré, called on Poujade, who was a Gaullist town councillor, to help him chase a tax auditor out of

his, Frégeac's, workshop. Frégeac has remained Poujade's brother-in-arms ever since.

There is little talk of "order," or of the "power" and "authority" of the state, at Poujadist mass meetings. Rude abuse of the government and parliament, in general and in detail, prevails, along with jovial cries of "to the gallows," "to the lamppost," and "mort!" without which no proper mass meeting, whether of right or left, is conceivable in France. Hang the ministers, impale the deputies, slaughter the "big fellows" and the "fat boys"—this is the "little people" of France speaking from the heart.

Poujade's oft-cited anti-Semitism is stimulated neither by racism, nor even commercial envy, but rather by backwoods xenophobia. Xenophobia is not particular to small-town France, but in an underpopulated country that for three decades has been host to immigrants it can easily be stirred up against "vagabonds" of any origin—perhaps most of all against North Africans, who "inundate France" and then aren't even "grateful" to their host country. The Poujadist beligerence towards "half-Frenchmen" gets its special coloration from the fact that Poujade entered the national scene under Mendès-France's government, which had not only a Jew at its head, but as its minister in charge of taxation, an ex-Gaullist with the Germanic-sounding name of Ulver, "whose parents," according to Poujade, "are still searching themselves for fleas on the Danube."

Poujade's only genuine political "idea," taken out of an elementary school textbook but easy to popularize, is to "convene the Estates General"—as in 1789. It is typical of the political mentality of the whole provincial petty bourgeoisie of France that, after a century under a parliamentary republic, the thousand-armed monster of the French state is confronted with the same real sense of defenselessness and vassalage as the absolute monarchy was. Just as at that time, the "little people" would like to send delegations with lists of their complaints directly to the "sovereign," because their complaints don't penetrate to Paris.

But didn't Mendès-France himself, when he took over the leadership of the Radical Socialist party in 1954, announce "We are in the year 1788!" Saint-Céré is not the only place in France where the clocks are slow.

THE unpolitical or anti-political phase of the "movement of Saint-Céré" ended a year ago, when Poujade "marched on Paris" with his small tradesmen from the provinces. That was both climax and end of his movement's political innocence. The success it achieved at that time would have fully satisfied any merely economic pressure group. Parliament agreed, trembling, to a fragmentary *ad hoc* tax law granting small business a tax moratorium and abolishing the tightened tax audits. In other words, traditional tax evasion became legal again—though the real complaint of the Poujadists is against having to pay taxes at all. For the moment, the removal of some injustices and a tax reduction estimated at fifty billion francs a year took much of the wind out of the movement's sails. The threatened general tax strike by the middle class collapsed, Poujade went home, and Paris thought the specter was exorcised for good and all.

But Poujadism was merely changing its skin. Poujade's natural talents as an agitator and the *élan* of his movement, which was still largely undefined politically, could be used for larger ends, as the Communists recognized when they encouraged the Poujadists in the beginning—and the Communists continued to treat them with at least benevolent neutrality for a while after they had made themselves independent. Ambitious organizers and wily financial backers came from the "homeless right" who saw even more hope in Poujadism as a field of political activity. Since Vichy these elements had found no suitable place for themselves in French politics; only reluctantly had they marched behind de Gaulle. Now, alongside Poujade's Union for Defense, which was concerned only with fiscal reform, there arose a Poujadist political organization and a weekly, *Fraternité française*. "Cadre schools" were set up, the effectiveness of whose edu-

cational work was demonstrated in the election campaign. Corporative "parallel organizations" were formed for peasants, workers, and the free professions. When parliament was dissolved and new elections held, these organizations were only in their first stages, and the Poujadists, taken unawares, had to hurriedly improvise their "joint lists," which is why the legality of some of their candidates' electoral victories is now open to parliamentary question.

So, in a parliament dominated by lawyers and teachers, sit twenty-three food dealers, fifteen artisans, a laundry owner, a druggist, a seed merchant, three small industrialists, and three "intellectuals" (some of them have been expelled in the meantime), all of them sworn to let themselves be hanged if they betray the "program of the Movement." That program still consists essentially in demands for fiscal reform and for the calling of the "Estates General." Helpless at first and inexperienced amid the subtle maneuvers of the parliamentary game, the Poujadist deputies very quickly found a parliamentary leader from outside their own ranks: an able lawyer and deputy named Tixier-Vignancour.

An authentic representative of the "parlor fascism" of pre-war days, Tixier-Vignancour had been in charge of Radio Vichy in 1940. After the war, he served as defense counsel in all the major trials for collaboration of the "Pétainists." He appeared in the last elections heading a new movement, the "Rassemblement national," that was attempting to revive the sort of thing Doriot stood for before the war, and which elected only three deputies.

Poujadism, without a leader, and "neo-fascism," without a following, found one another in the National Assembly. At the moment the large Poujadist bloc in parliament functions as a compliant appendage of Tixier-Vignancour's fascist grouplet, and the evolution of these small tradesmen strayed into parliament may very well turn out to be symbolic for the evolution of Poujade's entire movement. Richer in instincts than in political ideas, it has so far found in Pierre Poujade only a demagogue, not a political leader.

How can an authoritarian political movement be grafted on to an anarchistic tax revolt that lacks a precise program and even a "doctrine"? Well, many very respectable politicians in France get along quite well without that sort of baggage, and it is precisely the political indefiniteness of Poujadism, waiting and adapting itself to events and to the errors of its opponents, that is its most disturbing feature. At heart it has remained a last-ditch stand of provincials and shopkeepers against modernization, and somehow this has given it the solid organizational core that was lacking in pre-war anti-parliamentarism and postwar Gaullism. Poujadism's roots in the provinces and its schooling in spontaneous resistance to the power of the state are so many trumps. The movement forms a center around which other inchoate discontents and revolts can crystallize.

There is no lack of explosive material even outside the commercial middle class. Beneath unprecedented surface prosperity, the old French social structure is crumbling, and the social ferment has remained undiminished. The housing famine has scarcely been touched by showy constructions for millionaires and new barracks-like projects for the less affluent. Above all, the progressive collapse of the empire, which in Indo-China was still a distant and obscure tragedy, is in North Africa beginning to affect the living substance of France. "Defense of the Empire" is the most important new point that has been added to Poujade's program since his entrance into national politics. That the Poujadists, almost alone of all political groups in France, use the word "empire" rather than "French Union" or some other circumlocution, is already a whole program in itself.

It is only of anecdotal significance that Poujade has many connections with Algeria through his wife, who comes from there. But the combination of Poujadism and colonialism can be explosive. A dangerous reaction is inevitable when a regime permits inherited world power to slip piecemeal from the fingers of one-day governments, and undergoes an unbroken chain of defeats and limi-

tations without batting an eyelash. A growing number of Frenchmen returned from overseas, many of them soldiers, feel that they were not only left in the lurch by the politicians of the mother country, but betrayed by being used as pawns in parliamentary intrigue. Here is the basis for a "stab-in-the-back" legend that, alas, is not entirely legendary.

There has been no lack of danger signals. Two years ago, at the time of Dienbienphu, volunteers going to Indo-China demonstrated in front of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, abusing Prime Minister Laniel to his face and boxing War Minister Pléven's ears. At about the same time Marshal Juin answered a summons from Laniel with the contemptuous statement that the state had first to exist before he could give an accounting to it. Among the demonstrators at the Arc de Triomphe was a law student, one La Pen, who is now spokesman of the Poujadist group in parliament. Another Poujadist deputy is former Police Commissioner Dides, who in 1954 aired those "secret documents" purporting to convict the Mendès-France government of treason.

TODAY Poujadism is on the point of capturing the mass of French settlers in Algeria, and thereby of stirring up violent resistance to the home government's "policy of capitulation." In Algeria Poujadism has the chance to find, among a million Frenchmen, not only a second "mass base," but also plenty of money to finance all sorts of campaigns against the "traitors in Paris." It is a strange amalgam. Logically, tax strikes in the mother country and "war to the knife" overseas don't go together. In entering this new field of agitation, Poujadism is perhaps making the decisive turn from its role as a nuisance to a party of civil war. Contemporary French politics is hypnotized by historic dates, but there was nothing laughable about the repetition in Algiers on February 6, 1956, of February 6, 1934—the day when right-wing extremists and veterans' groups rioted in front of the Chamber of Deputies. The rioting in Algeria, blown up into an at-

tempted fascist putsch, became the starting point for the new Communist-Socialist-Radical "Popular Front against War and Fascism." Suddenly, everything returned to where it was twenty years ago: back to the street riots, the leagues, the militant veterans' organizations—and, on the other side, the beckonings of the Popular Front. Only the roles are somewhat differently distributed: now it is the Communists who do the beckoning and the others who do the hesitating. But now, as before, it is the extremists who lead the dance; the flirtations with civil war that filled the last pre-war and the first confused postwar years in France are ready to begin again. In the French National Assembly there now sit 152 Communists, 52 Poujadists, and three "neo-fascists." Together they form more than a third of the Assembly.

There are only two possible majorities, that of the Popular Front including the Communists, and that of the Center excluding the Communists. The first decision of the Socialists and Radicals, when they were called on to form a government, was to declare both combinations impossible. And though the Socialists and Radicals secretly wanted a center coalition, they systematically set all the switches in the direction of a Popular Front. It is true that they fear a Popular Front, but they fear it less than losing their standing as leftists.

With the battle cry, "left against right," Mendès-France's Republican Front fought the electoral campaign exclusively against the supporters of Faure's government. It was difficult, even with a microscope, to find any except a stylistic difference between the "dynamic program" of the Mendèsist "Jacobins" and the "opportunistic program" of Faure and the Popular Republicans. So anti-clericalism, the oldest weapon in the arsenal of *fin-de-siècle* radicalism, was once more wheeled out. Anti-clericalism has long been the only issue defining the French left as a whole, but also the only one for which it can gather no majority outside a Popular Front.

Today the government of the Republican Front, which entered the electoral campaign

with the slogan "not a *sou*, not a man for Algeria," has to summon new troops and raise new taxes for the holding of that country. It is carrying out exactly the same "reactionary" policy against which it agitated in every campaign meeting before the elections. Traditionally, the policies of the right, when they become too unpopular, are carried out by the leaders of the left. The French Republic has by now used this formula too often, and one of the consequences is that the whole non-Communist left has become discredited. A few weeks have sufficed to destroy the new prestige which the Socialist party won in five years of opposition, and to make all the promises of its propaganda look like a swindle.

Political maneuvers may suffice to "put over" unpopular measures, as the war in Indo-China was "put over" for ten years. But in the face of France's North African tragedy,

skill at parlor tricks is no longer enough. Algeria is a problem that can be settled only by a government that will take full responsibility for the sacrifices and the exertions, as well as for the concessions, now necessary. More riots and capitulations on the pattern of February 6, more setbacks and new troop levies for Algeria, without a way out or even a clearly proclaimed goal in sight, and that "Popular Front against Colonial War and Fascism" with which the men of the present government in France were toying in the past electoral campaign can become a reality against their will and through the "logic of the streets." And then "Poujadolf's" hour may strike, too.

The French equivalent of Hitler does not yet exist. Poujade, so far only an agitator, or someone else, a marshal or a civilian, must first hatch out into a "Fuehrer." But the possibility is very much in the air.